Workplaces of the Future

McKinsey research reaffirms that controlling the virus is "key to unlocking the economy" but with vaccines still in the testing phase, companies need to revisit their rapidly executed work from home plans. They need to create a more sustainable infrastructure because research is showing that 82% of company leaders expect work from home will continue, and 47% say they will let employees work remotely on a permanent basis. That's good news for 83% of people who, according to IBM Institute for Business Value, want the option to work from home.

The work from home reality means companies need to figure out their preferred strategy whether that's re-opening offices, creating a hybrid model or maintaining a full-time work from home structure. One thing is certain, the workplace of tomorrow will look very different than it did pre-COVID-19. Every company must evaluate the options and make decisions about what's best for their business and their people.

In addition to work from home continuing, I see a few trends that were accelerated by COVID-19 and I believe will continue or expand in the months and years ahead.

- Cloud – We have seen massive uptick in demand for cloud services and storage. At the partner level, we are also seeing a rapid acceleration in the development of products designed to meet the needs of customers who are shifting to cloud-based solutions.
- 5G – With huge demands on our network infrastructure, a reliable connection with low latency has never been more critical. According to this Forbes columnist, 2021 will be a "massive year for 5G technology".
- Virtual Events – It could bet at least another year before we start to see a widespread return to live and in-person events. Look for increased use of augmented reality and immersive technologies as we find new and creative ways to engage with our customers.
- Digital Education – IDC is reporting a huge surge in remote learning and digital education. In a world that continues to advance as quickly as ours, ongoing education and upskilling is a must.

Consumer-Business Lines Blurring

Another trend accelerated by the pandemic has been the blurring of the lines between enterprise or business hardware, and devices designed for consumer audiences. This move was driven in part by the need to rapidly equip staff with the tools they needed to set up offices at home.

During the pandemic, the PC took on an even more essential role in our lives. We need them to last long, perform faster and provide enhanced and immersive experience when we're connecting and collaborating (not to mention streaming entertainment or playing games!)

The innovation behind this week's unveiling of our 11th Generation Intel Core Mobile Processors is designed to meet the demands of today's consumers, as well as the needs of our students heading back to class (whether that's in person or online). The 11th Gen processor is built on our latest CPU architecture delivering industry-leading performance with discrete-level graphics, great battery life, and AI acceleration. And, with Intel® Optane™ built-in, users can quickly launch the applications they use most.

Now more than ever, consumer and business audiences alike are looking for uncompromising experience and intelligent performance from their PCs which have taken on a central role in all our homes.

Securing a Wider Network Perimeter

When more and more people started working from home, the network perimeter expanded dramatically and rapidly. Virtually overnight companies needed to find ways to protect themselves from potential threats coming at them from a wide area. Systems had to relearn traffic pattern behaviors in addition to monitoring external influences as remote workers tapped into corporate networks.

"With a wider, more open network perimeter and computing environment, businesses need the ability to monitor this new influx of data points," says Ron Culler, senior director of technology and solutions for ADT Cybersecurity, noting machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) is helping companies sift through the volumes of traffic data.

Supporting Remote Workers

I don't envy IT support staff in most companies today. With no warning, they had to ramp up to keep a remote workforce connected and secure, and they had to troubleshoot a myriad of issues faced by staff working from home (not to mention ensuring all updates were happening seamlessly).

It's not surprising to me we are seeing increasing interest in systems with Intel® vPro® technology because it's designed for exactly this kind of environment. We're also seeing demand for mini PCs like our Intel® NUC mini PCs and kits which can act as virtual desktops at the network edge. Virtual machines resolve many administrative support issues such as updates and offer secure connections to the network in places where internet connectivity isn't an issue.

Earlier this summer we announced a device as a service partnership with Ivanti to offer self-healing of endpoints for remote workers using the Intel vPro platform for on-premises and cloud-based endpoint remote management.

Workplaces Are Changing

The workplaces we remember will never be the same. We're now living in a world where dynamic and flexible workplace need the ability to respond fluidly to ever-changing situations. Hardware, software, connectivity, and services will need to come up with creative solutions to help companies adapt to a world that's been forever changed by the pandemic.

Written by Jason Kimrey